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ABSTRACT

In the spring of 1973 Macalester College seniors were sent a questionnaire asking them to assess their college experiences and their plans for the future. Among the questions included in the instrument was an open-ended item asking them: "What are the most important concerns that you see yourself having to face in the next few years?" Three hundred and seventy-three seniors received questionnaires; 242 (65 percent) returned completed instruments to the Office of Educational Research and of these, 212 seniors stated at least one concern. Analysis of the concerns indicated that they fell primarily into the areas of: Job and Career, Understanding Oneself, Interpersonal Relationships, and Life Style. (Author)

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The Macalester Class of 1973: Concerns About the Future

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Each year Macalester College sends a group of some 350 graduates into the working world or on to further their formal education. At that point, most of these seniors face the "real" world for the first time. Their lives prior to graduation had been centered on obtaining an education, and even if a semester had been taken off here and there, the students stuck to their goal of working toward a BA degree. In general then, these students are typical of the "traditional" BA recipient who is 20-22 years old and has been a full-time student since age 5 or 6. They, of course, may be quite different from "non-traditional" students who may have spent considerable time in the working world before beginning or continuing their education toward a degree.

Most traditional seniors have concerns about the future and must learn to adapt to "the" world and not just to "a" world comprised of students generally of the same age and background. For some the adaptation to what is often termed the "cold hard world" will be more difficult than for others. Recognizing that the graduates of today are being forced to do some serious thinking about the future if they hope to realize many of the goals and ideals which they have developed, the Office of Educational Research asked the 1973 Macalester seniors to express some of their concerns for the future.

The following report is the first of a series of reports using data obtained from the "Senior Questionnaire, 1973". In May of 1973, Macalester seniors were asked to complete a questionnaire which asked them to assess their college experiences and to comment on their plans for the future. Future reports will present more of the 1973 senior data and will compare these responses

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with other Macalester data from previous years and with national normative data.

Concerns of Seniors

As part of the 1973 questionnaire, seniors were asked: "What are the most important concerns that you see yourself having to face in the next few years?" Of the 373 seniors who received questionnaires, 242 (65%) returned completed instruments and 212 indicated at least one concern. Although a variety of responses were given, the comments fell largely into four main categories: Job and Career, Understanding Oneself, Interpersonal Relationships, and Life Style (See Table 1). A breakdown by sex indicated that proportionately more women than men had concerns in the Job and Career and life Style areas.

Job and Career - By far the greatest number of men and women were concerned about their future job and career stiuation. While many of the respondents did not indicate a particular type of job, but were interested primarily in something that would keep them financially afloat, a fairly large number of seniors spoke specifically of hoping to find a job that would be "satisfying", "meaningful", "challenging", or one they would be "happy" doing. Another large group of seniors expressed a desire to go to graduate or professional school --indicating specific concerns over selecting a school, being accepted, financing their education, or successfully completing school. Of those who had decided on a career, some expressed the hope that they would be able to pursue the career of their choice and/or do well in their field. A final group of responses indicated that there were some seniors who had not decided on a particular career and the process of decision-making was causing them concern.

When asked specifically what they planned to be doing next year, nearly one-half (45.8%) of the 1973 respondents indicated that they hoped to be working full-time, while the second and third most popular plans focused on going to graduate or professional school.

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When comparing the 1973 summary of plans with data from the three preceding senior classes (See Table 2), a number of trends emerge. The proportion of students seeking full-time employment after graduation is increasing as is the percentage of students planning to enroll in professional school. The percentage of Macalester graduates seeking graduate school enrollment and entering the military service have declined significantly since 1970. These changing patterns of post-college plans could well contribute to the fairly large number of students who expressed concerns about their job and careers.

The following quotes are characteristic of the 1973 senior responses regarding their future job and career:

> Survival vs. happiness. Making a living without being miserable. It seems I will need to summon up every ounce of creative stamina I possess so I can keep above falling into a job that's dull...i.e., society seems to need a lot of keypunchers, factory workers, secretaries and waitresses. I'll be damned if I'll do a job our technology could have robots doing!

> Finding a "career(s)" i.e., doing things that satisfy my desires to work toward the "harmonization" of society. In other words, I want a job, or a succession of jobs that make me happy, because ultimately, I can do good for others only if I am doing good for myself. Building a marriage. Determining the directions that I want my life to take.

> Initially, saving for and financing graduate school. With that accomplished my concerns will be: performance in graduate school that satisfy my criteria for advancement while at the same time fulfilling my financial and personal responsibilities to my wife and our children (children we plan to have beginning while I'm in school).

> Getting into and out of medical school successfully; getting seated in the proper field of medicine; then settling down (marriage, family, etc.)

> Most importantly will be deciding what career I intend to pursue and then doing whatever is necessary to achieve that (i.e., working to earn money, deciding what school to go to).

> Mostly having to do with my career objectives --which way I want to go and how important it is to me. If I can combine marriage and career -- do I want to, if not, which is more important.

Understanding Oneself - A second group of concerns focused on the seniors' desire to better understand themselves and find fulfillment, stability, and/or

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emotional security which would aid in developing a direction for their lives. In conjunction with self-knowledge, they hoped to be able to continue to grow -- whether it be emotionally, morally, spiritually, in self-confidence or in self-awareness.

As some of the seniors looked at themselves they anticipated a special effort having to be made in adapting to what they called the "real" world as opposed to the sheltered college environment. Evidently the feeling of being surrounded by a "protective shell" associated with college life was not expected in the world of work. Similar thoughts were expressed by those who saw a need to instill self-discipline and self-motivation into their behavior in order to meet the different demands imposed by the "real" world.

The following are typical comments:

> The step of leaving the protective shell of Macalester and going out into "the real world" is a big one. I will have to accept many responsibilities I haven't had before. From now on, I will be essentially on my own. Most of all I don't want to waste my life. It will take energy and will-power, but I want to become involved in other lives and concerns besides my own. I want to keep on living a full life, searching for my identity, for the truth of things, but that does not mean copping out on my responsibility to support myself financially.

> Coming to grips with being a woman and being independent. Developing self-confidence and self-awareness as a full human being; not falling into a security trap type relationship with anyone. Realizing what I want to do with my life.

> Keeping myself sane in the face of changing attitudes, society, myself. Finding emotional, physical, mental security. Accomplishing something of great value to me as a person.

> Facing ambiguity - to keep growing and to be satisfied to grow emotionally. To have changing self images and to be able to flow with, accept, and grow from all the change I impose on myself. To contribute by listening and being willing to change. To become wise and giving. To always remain open to giving to those who need (of my time, emotions, intellect, love and money). To maintain an appreciative understanding of as much as possible. To be free from fear and guilt.

> Developing the self-discipline to be able to create and learn outside of institutionalized settings - being able to do this and survive.

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Interpersonal Relationships - The 1973 seniors expressed some concerns centering around marriage. For some it was a question of whether the institution of marriage was or was not for them. For those who had not accepted marriage as a viable living situation there was still concern about some sort of satisfactory heterosexual relationship. Others who were seeking (or had sought) marriage were concerned about building a happy relationship while at the same time having the freedom to pursue their individual interests. Acceptance of marriage seemed to bring up the question of children. For some respondents it was a question of when to have children and for others it was a question of whether to have children at all.

Concerns regarding interpersonal relationships went beyond marriage questions. The seniors were also interested in maintaining and broadening their circle of friends and, particularly among the women, there was a desire to maintain a social concern for others.

The following quotes are characteristic of the concerns that seniors expressed in the area of interpersonal relationships:

> Marriage - whether it is any longer a viable way of life. Although I've always been brought up to consider marriage as "the way of life", I'm not at all sure now whether I, or any other person, can remain committed, caring, and at least relatively "in love" for 40-60 years or more. I think if a person wants children, marriage is a necessity for their sakes but I'm not sure that I do, and I'm uncertain about the whole thing.

> Finishing graduate school and connected with this deciding just what degree to obtain. Finding a job I will be happy in. Deciding whether to get married or enjoy the carefree bachelor life.

> Finding a job in which I am competent and happy. Making my marriage a happy one for both of us. Finding a church home (for inspiration, fellowship, and service). Deciding to have children. Helping my husband (-to-be) find where he belongs in the working world. Deciding where to live.

> ...also nuclear family vs. group living. I'm married but need a lot of people around to live with, and I don't think I want children now or for awhile.

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Getting a job in order to keep myself and future student-husband living decently. Deciding whether teaching is really the career for me. Deciding whether to have children and if so, when.

Develop a clearer concept of who I am and what my potentials are. Finding out a more meaningful way to relate to other people. To be aware of as many possibilities and viewpoints on issues important to my life. Learning to be more tolerant and concerned about others.

People are an important concern, dealing with their problems and joys as people.

Life Style - Life style concerns were the fourth area around which student questions clustered. While a concern for both men and women, such decision-making was somewhat more apparent for women than men. Specifically, some respondents were looking for a satisfactory life style while others were uncertain about where they wanted to live or what goals they wanted to strive for.

The following life style concerns were expressed by the seniors:

Developing a life style. What do I do with all my time between work? I would prefer not to become a vegetable glued to the TV, for instance.

Finding workable relationship between money-earning and life-style; a lasting or fully committed heterosexual relationship; finding/making a home; continuing my spiritual and emotional growth; learn to sing.

How I want to live my life. How I can be open to possibilities, changes, people. What I want to be and what will I do.

Simply making decisions as to my life style, job, area to live in, etc. A major concern of mine is how I'll adjust to a non-student life.

Conclusion

Clearly the 1973 Macalester graduates have many common concerns about their future with the biggest question centering on their place in the working world. Will they be able to find satisfying jobs or even ones that will pay their living expenses? Other students do not know what they want to do and are struggling with the possible alternatives. Along with career questions they also have more personal concerns dealing with a desire to know themselves better and to decide whether marriage is what they want-- or generally, just

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what type of life style they want to adopt.

Each Macalester graduating class faces a world of "unknowns". Many of these "unknowns", which relate to the concerns among the 1973 seniors, are not unique to this class but probably caused similar concerns for graduates in previous years. While the concerns have remained similar over the years, the possible solutions may be different. Particularly in the area of job and career decisions the students are now finding a more limited number of doors open to them while in the area of interpersonal relationships there are probably a greater number of life style options. The 1973 seniors have concerns and, no doubt, will find their own acceptable resolutions.

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Table 1

Four Major Concerns Expressed by 1973 Macalester Seniors

	Men (N=93)		Women (N=119)	
	n[1]	%[2]	n	%
Job and Career	68	73%	102	86%
Understanding Oneself	28	30%	32	27%
Interpersonal Relationships	21	23%	26	22%
Life Style	7	8%	23	19%

[1]Note that the columns of "n's" refer to the number of students expressing a particular area of concern. Thus, a student who indicated more than one area of concern will appear more than once in the table.

[2]The figures represent the percentage of respondents by sex who expressed a particular concern.

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Table 2

"What are your present plans for next year?"

	1970 Seniors N=201		1971 Seniors N=143		1972 Seniors N=156		1973 Seniors N=238	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Full-time employment	76	37.8%	60	42.0%	68	43.6%	109	45.8%
Graduate school	51	25.4	33	23.1	32	20.5	44	18.5
Professional school	17	8.5	14	9.8	21	13.5	37	15.6
Part-time school	5	2.5	5	3.5	8	5.1	19	8.0
Military service	13	6.5	9	6.3	1	.6	0	0.0
Travel	12	6.0	3	2.1	11	7.1	12	5.0
Homemaking	4	2.0	2	1.4	0	0.0	1	0.4
Other	23	11.4	17	11.9	15	9.6	16	6.7